

The Public's Health and the Law in the 21st Century
5th Annual Partnership Conference

Keynote Address

"Preparedness for Natural Disasters"

Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS,
U.S. Surgeon General and Commander, USPHS Commissioned Corps, DHHS

Monday, June 12, 2006
2:00-3:30 pm

As U.S. Surgeon General, one of VADM Richard H. Carmona's chief responsibilities is to direct the emergency preparedness and response efforts of the U.S. Public Health Service's Commissioned Corps. The Corps is an expert, diverse, flexible, and committed career force of some 6,000 public health physicians, nurses, and other public health related professionals. It has a statutory mandate and unique expertise to respond to the emergency and non-emergency health needs of the Nation. In addition, VADM Carmona is responsible for the Medical Reserve Corps, a civilian volunteer force of some 436 units and 80,000 volunteers who support local public health infrastructures across the Nation.

Commissioned Corps officers were central to the response the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service mounted to the health threats posed by Hurricane Katrina. In his address VADM Carmona will give an overview of the Corps' Katrina response, identify some critical operational, policy and legal issues the Corps encountered, and explore lessons learned for effective coordination of a wide spectrum of local, state, and federal agencies in future natural disaster response efforts. For the first time in a national disaster response, members of the Medical Reserve Corps were also deployed during the Katrina response, constituting the beginning of the Public Health Service Auxiliary.

Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS, was sworn in as the 17th Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service on August 5, 2002.

Born and raised in New York City, VADM Carmona dropped out of high school and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1967. While enlisted he received his Army General Equivalency Diploma, joined the Army's Special Forces, ultimately becoming a combat-decorated Vietnam veteran, and began his career in medicine.

After leaving active duty, VADM Carmona attended Bronx Community College, of the City University of New York, where he earned his associate of arts degree. He later attended and graduated from the University of California, San Francisco, with a bachelor of science degree (1977) and medical degree (1979). At the University of California Medical School, Dr. Carmona was awarded the prestigious gold headed cane as the top graduate. He has also earned a masters of public health degree from the University of Arizona (1998).

VADM Carmona has worked in various positions in the medical field including paramedic, registered nurse and physician. VADM Carmona completed a surgical residency at the University of California, San Francisco, and a National Institutes of Health-sponsored fellowship in trauma, burns and critical care. Dr. Carmona is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, and is also certified in correctional health care and in quality assurance.

Prior to being named Surgeon General, VADM Carmona was the chairman of the State of Arizona Southern Regional Emergency Medical System, a professor of surgery, public health and family and community medicine at the University of Arizona, and the Pima County Sheriff's Department surgeon and deputy sheriff.

VADM Carmona has also held progressive positions of responsibility as chief medical officer, hospital chief executive officer, public health officer, and finally chief executive officer of the Pima county health care system. He has also served as a medical director of police and fire departments and is a fully-qualified peace officer with expertise in special operations and emergency preparedness, including weapons of mass destruction.

VADM Carmona has published extensively and received numerous awards, decorations, and local and national recognition for his achievements. A strong supporter of community service, he has served on community and national boards and provided leadership to many diverse organizations.